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Several Narrative Strategies in Yiddish and Czech Stories

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This article deals with six short stories written in Yiddish and Czech analyzing their narrative strategies. In *The German* by Sholem Aleichem the limited first-person perspective of the story makes it impossible to look into the inner world of the German. Similar characters are presented in Aleichem's *Hard Luck* and *Elijah the Prophet*. At the end of *Hard Luck* a dialogue breaks the limited perspective. The main character of Isaac Leybush Peretz's *The Shtrayml* seems to be a type of naive narrator; in fact, in the last part of the story, he expresses the author's irony and social criticism. *The German* by Aleichem probably inspired *The Miracle with Julča* by Czech author Ivan Olbracht. Here, however, the protagonist's perspective is sometimes extended by the author's perspective. In Ladislav Grosman's *The Bride* the contrast between the characters' and the readers' expectations is presented by the significant change of the narrator's point of view. The peripheral narrator concentrated on private life becomes the author's narrator who knows the future.

KEYWORDS: Yiddish literature; Czech literature; Sholem Aleichem; Isaac Leybush Peretz; Ivan Olbracht; Ladislav Grosman

The aim of this article is to take several short stories written in Yiddish and analyze them in terms of storytelling and narrative construction. It focuses on the classics of the Yiddish culture at the turn of the 20th century (Shmeruk, 1992). These older authors, Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Leybush Peretz, are compared to the younger Czech authors Ivan Olbracht and Ladislav Grosman whose works were probably inspired by the Yiddish stories of the former. The comparison will analyze narrative strategies, mainly using similar motifs and devices. Notwithstanding that there are many publications concerning the above authors to date, no researcher has paid attention to this comparative topic, save for one short article by Peter Schubert.

Austrian theoretician Franz K. Stanzel distinguishes three main narrative constructions in his influential book *Theorie des Erzählens* (1979, [A Theory of Narrative, 1986]): the authorial narrative, figural narrative and first-person narrative. The last of these, the first-person narrative, is a mode of storytelling in which the storyteller recounts events from his or her own point of view explicitly using pronouns such as *I*, *me*, or similar designations of the grammatical first-person. It takes various forms and modifications (see in more detail Cohn, 1978, 308). The first-person speaker might be 1) a protagonist of the story; 2) a less important (peripheral) character; or 3) a witness to events. From another perspective, the first-person narrative story emphasizes a) the direct experiences of the narrator, or, b) the commentaries of the narrator; here the narrator talks about incidents that happened in the past. Stanzel and other researchers call these devices the *erlebendes Ich* (the experiencing self, narrated I) and *erzählendes Ich* (the narrating self, narrating I) (Schwalm, 2023).

1.

The story *The German* (1908/1909, (Der Daytsh)) by Sholem Aleichem utilizes both types 1a and 1b. The specific backdrop of this story is characteristic of Aleichem's writing style. It is set in the small but fictitious town of Dražne in the Russian Empire. At the beginning of the story the narrator whose name is Jona Joven addresses the reader. His speech is

in part stylized as a *skaz*, a form of oral narration often used in Russian literature (Titunik, 1977). Jona says he is a native of Dražne, from a *shtetl* in the Podolia Governatore.

He is a poor Jew. After the new railway has been built in the town making his old job obsolete, he tries to find a new job. Jona sees a German passenger at the station and offers him a “first rate inn” and “the best catering” in town. In reality, however, he brings the German to his own dilapidated house with only one closet and one bed. He has to persuade his wife, who does not trust her husband, to take care of the German guest and to prepare food for him. The German, who is waiting for his wagons with his machines in the town, is not happy with the hotel, especially when fleas bite him every night. Nevertheless, after staying for six days, he pays 25 rubles for the room and board. Jona and his wife are excited and believe that God himself had sent the German to them.

So far it seems that Jona’s character is constructed along the stereotypical lines of a *smart Jew* (v. Schoeps, Schlör, 1995, 103–118) able to outfox Gentiles and cheat them out of money. In the second part of the story this traditional plot and character are problematized. The chosen narrative perspective, the first-person narrative, precludes the reader from seeing into the character and inner thoughts of the antagonist, the German, who remains unnamed. The German’s motivation for his actions is therefore unclear and Jona, the narrator and protagonist, together with the reader, are left to guess.

First, Jona receives a message from the post office in Dražne informing him that he has to pay 14 copecks postage to pick up a letter. The letter is in German. After a deal of effort, Jona finds a pharmacist who is able to translate it for him. The German is writing and thanking him for his nice clean apartment and for his hospitality. Jona says to his wife the German could be a fool and thanks God and wishes He would send such a German every week. Step by step, however, new letters and packages from abroad come with postage that must be paid for. The postal clerk refuses to reveal who the sender is and Jona, convinced that it is something important for him, pays more and more: 28 copecks, 56 copecks, one ruble and 12 copecks and eventually 2 rubles and 24 copecks. All of them have been sent by the German who keeps

thanking Jona for his help in Dražne. Each time the German writes that he will never forget Jona's kindness, and goes on to describe his life, even sending a portrait of himself to Jona. Jona grows increasingly angry with the German and cannot understand the reason the German keeps sending him things by mail. He begins to see him in a completely different light. He was an odd customer, a bastard. He was like poison...

Finally, Jona receives a telegram which demands he come to Odessa immediately and find a trader by the name of Gorgelštajn in the Victoria hotel. The trader urgently needs Jona on a business matter. Jona does not want to make such a long trip, but his wife urges him to go because it might be a good deal. He goes to Odessa and looks for Gorgelštajn, who is not yet at the hotel. Jona sleeps on the street to save money. After six days, when he finally catches Gorgelštajn, who is also a Jew, he finds that Gorgelštajn gives him the warmest greetings from the German who only wants to thank him for the clean accommodation and for all of his honesty and conscientiousness.

Jona curses. He curses the misfortune that has befallen him and decides to move out of Dražne to another town.

This protagonist changes from being a smart Jew to being the figure of a poor victim, a *shlimazel*. It is likely that the German seeks revenge on Jona and Jona himself seems all the more to be a fool rather than the German.

2.

In 1937 the Czech writer Ivan Olbracht published *The Golet in the Valley* [Golet v údolí] set in the Jewish communities in the Carpathian Ruthenia, a part of the interwar Czechoslovakia, which today belongs to Ukraine. The first of the three stories in this book is *The Miracle with Julča* [Zázrak s Julčou]. Olbracht used religious and cultural terms from Jewish life, such as *cheder* (a Jewish traditional elementary school), *melamed* (a teacher in a *cheder*), *barches* (bread eaten on ceremonial occasions) and *treyste* (ritually impure, the opposite of kosher), as well as Yiddish phrases intended to evoke the setting of his story:

“Git morgn! Listen up, Ester” (Olbracht, 2001, 211).

“Git morgn, Laja...” (Olbracht, 2001, 215).

In 1980 Peter Schubert published an article comparing Ivan Olbracht's short story *The Miracle with Julča* (1937) to Sholem Aleichem's most famous work, *Tevje the Dairyman* (1894) (Tevye der milkhiter). Schubert assumed (1980, 287–290; Zitová, 2016, 280) that both works probably shared an unknown common source. Another possibility, according to Schubert, was that Aleichem's story inspired Olbracht. Several situations in both works are to some extent analogous. In the first chapter of *Tevje the Dairyman*, titled *Tevje Strikes It Rich*, Tevje, a poor pious Jew, meets strangers by chance and becomes wealthy. Bajnyš, the protagonist in Olbracht's *The Miracle With Julča*, could be seen as a similar character. Like Tevje he has to provide for a large family and has no means to do so. In spite of this he still trusts in God, believing He will protect him. When he meets two Czech tourists who need help, he is convinced that God has performed a miracle. He perceives himself to be like Abraham to whom God had sent a ram, so that he need not sacrifice his child. Bajnyš rents his horse to the tourists and accompanies them for four days. He thus earns enough money for food for his children, at least for some time.

In contrast to Schubert's opinion, however, it may be assumed that there is another of Aleichem's works closer to Olbracht's *The Miracle With Julča*. *The Miracle With Julča* might have been inspired by the above-mentioned short story *The German*. In fact, Ivan Olbracht could not read Yiddish and until the 1930s, when he visited Carpathien Ruthenia every summer between 1931 and 1936, he had no link with Jewish culture. It seems improbable that he knew *Tevje the Dairyman*, since it was first published in Czech in 1958. He may have read the story *The German* because it was translated into Czech by Vincenc Červinka in the anthology *Stories From the Ghetto* (1932, [Povídky z ghetta]), five years before Olbracht's short story was published.

Olbracht's Bajnyš Zisovič in *The Miracle With Julča* is probably more similar to the character of Jona in *The German*, and less so to Tevje. Both Jona and Bajnyš are the type of *smart Jews* who hope Gentiles are simple-minded and may be easily tricked. While Tevje meets rich Jewish women living in the city of Jehopec, representing the actual city of Kyiv,

near his home, Jona's antagonist, the German, and Bajnyš's antagonists, the Czechs, are all wealthy Gentiles from foreign lands and different cultures. Like Jona, Bajnyš believes that God himself sent him some *goim*. Both Jona and Bajnyš offer their gentile customers "a very favorable business opportunity". In fact, *The German* features lousy accommodation and overpriced meals and *The Miracle* features a decrepit old mare rather than the "only one good horse in the village". Jona and Bajnyš outwit the foreigners, and each earns money for their family. Unlike Jona and Bajnyš, when Tevje brings the Jewish women, who were lost in the forest, to their summer house, he is passive and waits meekly outside of their home. The rich Jews give him food, money and finally a cow, all of their own volition.

There are also differences in the storytelling between Ivan Olbracht and Sholem Aleichem. While the limited first-person perspective (types 1a and 1b) dominates in Sholem Aleichem's two stories, the narrative perspective in *The Miracle With Julča*, based on third person narration, constantly changes. Readers perceive events from the point of view of the main character, Bajnyš. This limited point of view, however, is sometimes extended by the author's or other character's points of view. In the sequence which sees Bajnyš negotiating with the blacksmith's wife and asking for some radishes, for instance, she is at first willing to give him one, but he demands four. Both grow excited because Bajnyš needs food for his children and Laja is preserving food for her own family.

"Three more!" screams Bajnyš.

"Only one", yells Laja.

"Three!"

"No!"

"Three!"

"Two!"

"So put it here!" His eyes are burning with looks that kill" (Olbracht, 2001, 216).

The whole sequence, especially the last sentence, is presented from the author's and eventually Laja's point of view. It is rather more of a dramatic dialogue than part of the narration from Bajnyš's point of view and the dominance of Bajnyš's perspective is thus diminished.

Another scene depicts the money which Bajnyš received for carrying stones with his horse. The scene is told twice but differently each time. The first time Bajnyš describes the scene to his wife: "The boss paid him fifteen crowns (...), Bajnyš's money was lying on the table, a ten-crown banknote and a five-crown coin" (217).

The second time the story is told, the same scene is depicted from the point of view of Bajnyš himself: "...Bajnyš has a purse hanging from around his neck, hidden under his shirt, on his chest with a green one hundred-crown banknote inside. That is from the money that he earned for carrying stones (...) and that was lying on the table near to a ten-crown banknote and a five-crown coin" (230). Bajnyš kept this money from his wife because he was saving for his oldest son Chaim's studies. This corresponds to the tradition of Eastern Judaism that the ideal profession for one's son is to be a pious scholar. The mother of the family takes care of day-to-day life while Bajnyš, as father, wants his eldest son to study in a Jewish school and to become a *bocher* (230). He has thereby saved the sum of one thousand crowns while he and his family go hungry. The narrator reveals this to the readers by gradually changing the perspective. In contrast, *The German* uses an invariable narrative mode, the limited perspective of the first person.

Two parts of the plots of both stories are similar. They may be described as the exposition and the business. *The German* also includes a third, final part: the German's revenge, not included in *The Miracle*.

Each story describes the situation of the main characters. Jona is in trouble after a new railway station is built in his small town. He can find neither work nor opportunity to make money for his family. The first plot in *The Miracle* is more fully explained. Readers learn a good deal more about Bajnyš. He has eight children and is very poor. He has no regular job. His wife complains that the family has no food and their children are hungry. He therefore comes to the store of Salamon Fux and asks for some flour and bread on credit. Fux and his daughter refuse to let him have it. They argue that he already owes them 80 crowns. Bajnyš begs a piece of bread off of Fux's wife in the kitchen and then he gets two radishes and an onion from Mrs. Nachamkes, the blacksmith's wife. Returning home, his wife scolds him again for his inability to make money for his family. Although he is in great need, he is not overcome

by despair because he hopes God will help him, as He did when He sent manna and quails to the Jews in the desert. This desperate situation and Bajnyš's faith that he will receive God's help is similar to several Yiddish stories. In Isaac Leybush Peretz's short story *The Magician*, for instance, a poor Jewish couple is without the necessary festive food, candles or other decorations to celebrate the Passover (Roskies, 1996, 139–142). The wife laments, but her husband believes that God will save them. Indeed, an unknown man comes and miraculously conjures up the ceremonial candles, a table with *matzah* and the other food and wine necessary for the festivities. Bajnyš also believes he will be helped by a miracle. The changing perspective in the story nevertheless makes coincidence a more likely explanation.

The second parts of stories, the so-called business elements seem analogous to each other. Naive Gentiles are deceived by Jews. The Jew will take advantage of Gentiles' difficulties and make a seemingly excellent offer. In fact, the Gentiles are cheated and out of their money. This is a plot that is to be found in many stories and in Jewish jokes, written by both Jews and non-Jews alike. Both stories progress to some extent, however, from the depiction of these stereotypical situations. The characters of *smart Jews* are problematized. *The German* uses the limited first-person narrative and the readers do not know what the German feels or thinks. Everything is from Jona's point of view. The German pays an exorbitant amount for accommodation and food, but in the last part, "the German's revenge", the German transpires not to be as naive as Jona had assumed. He tricks Jona out of more of his money than Jona had tricked out of him. The Czech tourists in *The Miracle*, by contrast, discover that they have been cheated on the first day. The readers recognize this through the dialogues in which their feelings are expressed. At first, they are upset, but they later laugh at the whole incident. In the end they behave completely differently than the German in Aleichem's story. When they learn that Bajnyš's family is extremely poor they give him more money and promise to send clothes and shoes for his children. For this reason Bajnyš, in contrast to Jona, remains a *smart Jew*.

3.

Aleichem's short story *Hard Luck* (1910, in Yiddish [*Nito keyn mazl!*]) is one of his *Railroad Stories*. It begins with an authorial narrative. The setting and time of day of the story are briefly mentioned in the opening sentences: "It was nighttime and there were three of us in the second-class waiting room at the station" (Aleichem, 1987, 255). The main character and narrator, "a nattily dressed gentleman who was clutching an attaché case for dear life", however, takes the floor in the first paragraph and remains there till the end. The readers do not know his name; only his profession: he is a traveling diamond dealer.

In certain respects, this character is similar to Jona in *The German*. This employs type 1b. The diamond dealer considers himself a *smart Jew* who knows business and understands money-making.

I don't mean to boast, because publicity is the last thing I'm after, but ask anyone who knows the least thing about it, and he'll tell you that I'm in a class by myself. If someone else can sell you X amount of diamonds, I can sell you 3X. It's an art and I'm an artist (256).

The central part of the plot takes place in Yehupetz, Aleichem's fictitious name for Kyiv. The mention of the Dnieper River also suggests this. The salesman tries in vain to sell his diamonds to a rich man. Taking a cab back to the station, he discovers that he has lost his briefcase with all his valuable diamonds. He suddenly sees a young man running and calling after him: "Here, you dropped this..." The young man holds out the briefcase in his hand and returns it to the salesman.

The salesman feels immensely happy. He does not know how to express his gratitude to the unknown young man: "You've saved my life. (...) God Himself will reward you for what you've done!" (257). The young man refuses any reward. So the salesman invites him for some food and wine in a restaurant. During the dinner, they talk, and the young man seems to be "extremely likeable with an attractive face and deep, dark earnest eyes" (257). The salesman tells him that he has not only saved his property but also his honor because he would have been indebted to jewelers for all the diamonds. If he returned home without diamonds,

no one would believe him; everyone would think it was just a simple trick. Then he would have no choice but to hang himself.

The first-person narrative means the readers share this perception of the situation with the salesman. As in the case of *The German*, we do not see into the thoughts and feelings of the unknown young man who is depicted as honest, friendly and modest. Suddenly the plot takes an unexpected twist that completely switches the readers' perception of his character.

After dinner they say goodbye and the salesman pays his bill in the restaurant. He finds out that his case has disappeared again. He sees that his young fellow has also vanished without a trace. He realizes that the young man is actually a cunning thief. The desperate salesman raises the alarm, and with the help of the police searches all the places in the city where the young thief could be. The thief is at last detained with the case and all the diamonds are recovered.

The salesman who narrates the story does not understand how such a change of behavior is possible. He asks the young man: "Please, explain it to me before I go crazy: where's the logic in first running after me with my case and refusing to take even a cent for it, and then, the minute my back is turned, walking off with it again?" (258)

In his answer, at the end of the story, the readers have the first opportunity to look inside the mind of the antagonist. This is different from *The German*, in which the motivation and internal feelings of the German remain unknown. *Hard Luck* provides an open explanation of actions in the story in a similar way to thrillers or detective stories.

He looked at me (...) and said as calmly as you please, "What does one thing have to do with the other? A good deed is a good deed, but stealing is my profession. (...) I'm a Jewish thief with a house full of children and the worst luck you ever saw. (...) Stealing, thank God, is no problem. The problem is getting caught. That's where I never have luck" (259).

Returning home by train, the salesman feels sorry for the thief and tells himself that he could save him.

Readers' perspective on both characters eventually changes. At the beginning, the narrator considers himself a *smart Jew* because he sells

goods much more expensively than he buys them. He is later unexpectedly cheated by the thief who changes in his eyes from the likeable young man to the cunning trickster. The change of narrative perspective from the first-person, limited, as it is, by his experience to the dialogue reveals that the young thief is a luckless man, a *shlimazel*. This is the reason the title of the story, *Hard Luck*, is related to the thief rather than the salesman who was cheated, as readers might initially expect.

4.

Another of Aleichem's stories, *Elijah the Prophet* [Eliyahu Hanavi] is constructed as a childish narration, a device Aleichem often used. It employs type 1b. The narrator and protagonist in one person is a little boy. From a wealthy family, of the seven children, he is "the sole surviving son" which is the reason his parents are worried about him and the reason he is not allowed to play with other children.

The plot takes place during the Passover holiday. The previous year, the boy had fallen asleep at the very beginning of the *Seder*, the celebration dinner. He failed to ask his father the four questions it is the duty of the youngest family member at the Seder to ask. His mother tells him that he must not fall asleep again this year; he must endure the entire dinner ceremony. The prophet Elijah will otherwise come for him with a long sack, and put him into it and take him away.

The boy, who is excited about the holiday, drinks a whole glass of wine after the *kiddush* and falls asleep, in spite of all his efforts. He suddenly hears the door creak and someone come. It is an old man with a long beard and a sack on his back. Elijah the Prophet walks up to the boy:

"Well, little boy, hop into my sack, and let's go", the old man says sweetly.

"Where to?" I ask.

"You'll see later", he replies. (Aleichem, 2022)

The boy is frightened but he begins to negotiate with Elijah. This is something of a characteristic Jewish habit, a largely Hasidic tradition. The

orders of holy men, prophets, and even God himself are not seen as immutable, as being set in stone.

This phenomenon is described in *Nine Gates* (1937, [*Devět bran*]), a book by Jiří Mordechai Langer, which portrays the customs of Hasidim, and describes, among other things, the holy man Mayerl from Przemyslan (in modern day Ukraine). Mayerl's preferred occupation is praying for great sinners whom God would forgive.

But once – if it only happened once, of course, only one single time – when Mayerl was interceding for a particularly hardened and shameful sinner, and this time God simply would not forgive him, then Mayerl—just think of it!—actually stamped his foot at God and the man was immediately pardoned (Langer, 1961, 60).

Another Hasidic holy man, Rebbe Melech from Lizensk (modern day Leżajsk in Poland), even pronounced judgment on God. One devoted and poor Jew, Moyshe Wolf, complained of the unjust oppression to which the Jews were being subjected in the Austrian Empire. He had to pay four hundred thalers for a marriage license. He filed a suit against the Lord who had promised the Jews his support and protection. After all, Rebbe Melech found that the plaintiff was right. In three days, Emperor Joseph abolished the anti-Jewish laws and Wolf's daughter was able to get married (Langer, 1961, 130–131).

According to this Jewish tradition, in *Elijah the Prophet*, the boy narrator also tries to dispute Elijah's orders. He argues that he cannot leave because he is a rich man's child and the only son in the family. Elijah gives this no consideration, however, and answers: “[I am telling you] for the last time, little boy. (...) One or the other; either say goodbye to your parents forever and come with me or remain here fast asleep forever. For all eternity”. The boy asks Elijah to give him just one minute to think it over. “I will give you one minute to consider it, child’, he says, and his loving and faithful eyes smile. ‘But no more than that’”.

The story finishes with an open ending, to the readers' surprise. The narrator asks the question of the reader what he should do in one minute. He does not answer the question himself. It may be seen as a challenge to the reader, which corresponds to the spirit of the Jewish dialectic,

with arguments and counter-arguments, as this device is also often found in Jewish jokes.

How did Elijah come into this story? Elijah is documented in the Books of Kings in the Hebrew Bible as a prophet who performed great miracles. He was taken into heaven and will return before the End Times.

In the story, the prophet's dignity is preserved. "His face was yellow and wrinkled, but infinitely kind and beautiful. And his eyes – oh, what lovely, friendly eyes! Gentle, loving, faithful eyes". Nevertheless, Elijah reminds the reader of the devil which is connected to Saint Nicholas and the accompanying angel in Central and East European folklore. On the sixth of December it is customary that a trio of Saint Nicholas, an angel and a devil go from house to house visiting the children. The angel gives presents to the good children and the devil punishes the bad ones. He may put them into his bag. The prophet Elijah therefore has the same mission as the devil in this tradition. It is not to be dismissed that the folk custom involving Saint Nicholas influenced Aleichem's work and he may have projected it into the character of Elijah in this story.

Using the perspective of a little boy in the first person, the story provides the reader with a naive and limited perspective. The boy is incapable of understanding all of the events and he mixes real facts with his imagination. Narratology describes a traditional ending in novels and short stories as *closure*. Closure "refers to the satisfaction of expectations and the answering of questions raised over the course of any narrative" (Porter Abbott, 2005, 65–66). In contrast to closure, *Elijah the Prophet* utilizes a device which was very unconventional at the time. Is the figure of Elijah a part of the boy's dream? Is he the father in disguise, or is someone else trying to frighten him? Or is it really Elijah who has returned to earth? The boy's future remains untold.

5.

Isaac Leybush Peretz's short story *The Shtrayml* [Dos Shtrayml] was first published in 1893. This first-person story is a monologue (type 1a and 3b) told by the older furrier and cap maker Berl. He lives in a *shtetl* and is a typical outsider. Although he has been working for 50 years, he

and his wife have nothing to eat but potatoes. He does not own a place in a synagogue, no one in the Jewish community calls him to meetings. Not even his wife respects him; she calls him a bum and a slob. "So what am I? A nothing!" He seems to be a type of what Leszek Engelking calls "a naive narrator" (Engelking, 2020, 358), an unsophisticated naive and limited person. His only pride and joy is making *shtraymls*: "(...) once in a while I unleash a *shtrayml* on the community, and they bow down before me!" (Peretz, 1958, 85).

A *shtrayml* is a wide-brimmed, round fur hat worn by Hasidim in the East. It is the most costly part of a man's wardrobe. For the narrator it is not only an item of clothing but also a symbol of wealth and power, something akin to a royal crown in the world of *shtetls* dwellers. The *shtraymls* are often worn by rabbis and, according to Berl, they are a source of authority, greater than the police or the military.

His monologue is stylized as a speech to an audience. Berl uses rhetorical questions: "For who wears a *shtrayml* these days? A rabbi!" (80). In fact, however, Berl's simple-minded narration elicits social criticism from the traditional Jewish world of Eastern Jews based on social hierarchy and blind obedience.

Berl usually sews rough jackets for peasants and porters, ordinary coats for common people, and uses raccoon fur for millers. The peasants work hard in the fields in the summer and in the winter they have to carry sacks of grain to the mill. Otherwise, they are unable to support their families. The narrator addresses God and asks: Why have you created so many various kinds of coats? "Why does one have raccoon fur, another a porter's coat, and a third person a peasant's clothes?" (81). Peretz added this passage in later editions: "And a fourth person has nothing at all?" (Frieden, 1995, 268). It was written in Peretz's "radical period", when he showed sympathy for social democracy and was even imprisoned for his activities. Berl does not answer these questions, he only asks: "Well, should that leave me satisfied?" (Peretz, 1958, 81).

The core of the story lies in the last quarter of the text. Berl has so far depicted situations that were more or less connected to him personally. From this moment he ceases to be the protagonist and becomes a witness to events. In the typology mentioned at the beginning, this means a change from 1a to 3b. These last paragraphs, however, are also related

to the previous narration, mainly to Berl's questions put to God about the inequality of people.

There is a pub on the same street where Berl lives. The owner of the tavern has twin daughters. They are pretty girls and well-behaved. Both of them have boyfriends and both become pregnant. They each conceived their child, however, under completely different circumstances. The first conceived "in a schoolyard, in a rubbish heap, under a filthy woolen canopy with silver letters". The second, by contrast, conceived her child in a beautiful romantic setting, it "happened in some warbling woods on a meadow of grass and flowers, under God's blue skies bestrewn with stars" (89). Their life thereafter, however, was quite different from the experience of conception. The reason for this was, according to the narrator, the first daughter conceived "with the *shtrayml*" and that was the reason she gave birth to her boy in a quiet home and in a white bed. She now lives happily and has other healthy children. The second daughter, however, conceived the child "without the *shtrayml*". She strictly disguised her pregnancy and her labor pains came upon her in some cellar. Her child was stillborn; she herself disappeared; perhaps she serves strangers somewhere; perhaps she is no longer alive.

It is apparent that the *shtrayml* ceases to be a common item of daily apparel, a part of clothing. It becomes a sign, a symbol. The narrator does not evaluate his characters directly. From this tale is nevertheless clear that the first sister followed orthodox religious conventions, submitting to the social hierarchy embodied in the *shtrayml*. She married according to Jewish custom and was accepted by Jewish society. Her sister refused such obedience and conceived her child "without the *shtrayml*". She was ostracized by the Jewish community in the *shtetl* and was ruined.

At the beginning of the story the character of Berl is stylized as a naive loser, rather as a *shlemiel* [clumsy person] than a *shlimazel* [luckless man]. According to Bondyová, "a *shlemiel* is a man who pours a bowl of hot soup on the head of a *shlimazel*." (Bondyová, 2003, 138). The ending presents the author's irony and his social criticism directed at the rigid world of Jewish *shtetls* ruled by blind obedience and excluding anyone who fails to submit to it.

6.

Ladislav Grosman was younger than the three previous authors, all of whom were writing at the turn of the 20th century. Born in 1921, he came from an orthodox Jewish family in Slovakia. Almost his entire family perished during the Holocaust. After World War II he lived and worked mostly in Prague and wrote in Czech. In 1968 he emigrated to Israel, where he died in 1981. His stories are often set in Eastern Slovakia, in small towns with orthodox Jewish communities. Grosman's Jewish characters are similar to Aleichem's protagonists. Analogous to the above works, Grosman's stories are symptomatically anti-heroic; their characters lack the conventional attributes of positive heroes. They are usually poor, simple Jews who are trying to earn money and to support their large families. As in traditional Yiddish works, they oscillate between naivety and cunning. The first-person narrative is used in several of Grosman's stories, such as the novel *Hellish Luck* (first issued posthumously in 1994, [Z pekla štěstí]), the novella *The Bride* (1969, [Nevěsta]) and the short stories *Frójimek has the Head of an Old Man* (1969, [Frójimek má hlavu kmeta]) and *The Municipal Carrier* (posthumously in 2018, [Obecní nosič]). In *Hellish Luck* and *The Municipal Carrier*, when the speaker and protagonist are the same character, type 1a is used, whereas in *Frójimek has the Head of an Old Man* a peripheral character narrates (type 2a). In *The Bride* a witness to the events (type 3a) narrates. The following text focuses on this last story, *The Bride*.

The plot takes place in a small Slovak town “under Mount Vihorlat”. This is very probably meant to be Humenné in eastern Slovakia, where Grosman was born. Readers do not find out this setting until the middle of the story. The narrator's name, age and profession are unknown. It is only certain that he is a man belonging to the Jewish community in the town and is well informed about the Eliáš family, which is central to the plot. The temporal setting of the action is not more precisely determined until the second half of the story, where it is said that there is a celebration in the town, “the third anniversary of the establishment of the new order in the new state” (Grosman, 2020, 134). The Slovak Republic was established on March 14, 1939, so the story is set in the winter and spring of 1942. At that time the deportations of Slovak Jews to Auschwitz and Majdanek began.

Although external historical events significantly influence the plot, at first, the narrator does not even talk about them and later records them only in fragments. In his development of the plot he concentrates on the Eliáš family and the main character, Lízinka, the oldest daughter. She works as a dressmaker and has her own workshop in the Eliáš family's house. She remains unmarried, however, which worries her parents but not Lízinka herself. For the first half of the story, the search for a suitable groom seems to be the crux of the story. There are many traditional Jewish (and non Jewish) tales with similar plots (for instance, Aleichem's *Teve the Dairyman* or Peretz's *Delighting in Children*). In all probability Grosman was inspired by the Yiddish short stories of Aleichem and Peretz that he knew from his home town and later also in Czech translation. As in Grosman's *Bride*, most of them use exaggeration and comic elements. This also applies to Lízinka and her family, when the groom that is found by her parents is a small and sickly young man called Pot'u. In the meantime, however, external circumstances disrupt her parents' plans in the story.

News arrives regarding the mandated registration of single Jewish girls over sixteen years of age. Only now is it revealed that the story is set in the time of the mass persecution of the Jews. This registration order is only mentioned by the way in the dialogue between Lízinka's father and his friend Chasel Lindauer. The narrator briefly recalls the aryanization (the seizure of all Jewish possessions of value, following the model in Nazi Germany) and Lindauer mentions that the Jews must wear yellow stars. This measure was introduced in Slovakia by the so-called Jewish Codex, a set of anti-Semitic regulations, in September 1941. The characters in Grosman's story do not, however, consider the registration of Jewish girls to be too threatening. Lindauer advises Mr. Eliáš to marry Lízinka off, so she will be released from the registration. While Lízinka's father does not know what to do, Chasel Lindauer seems to be a *smart Jew*. In fact, both characters are naive because the following external events are completely unexpected.

The author thus constructs the basic tension of the story. The narrator's perspective is a limited perception of the local Jewish community of the time. The Jews do not realize that they are in danger of transports and concentration camps. They believe that the girls may be saved by

marriage, or that they will be sent to work for a time and return soon, as the official propaganda had promised. The Eliáš family, like the narrator, still concentrates on Lízinka. They reproach her for her unconventional behavior in the fashion of traditional Jewish families in stories commonly written in Yiddish.

Even when the hasty weddings of Jewish girls are unrecognized by the authorities, Lízinka's parents nonetheless go ahead and organize a Jewish wedding with a rabbi and all the ceremonies in the expectation that it will help her. When two hundred Jewish girls are gathered in the local cinema, the Jews still hope the girls will return home. Only one old and almost blind Jew Mendel-Chájim Gold says "my heart tells me it's the end, it's the beginning of the end" (157).

In contrast, readers already know what awaits the Jews in Slovakia. Between March and October 1942 the vast majority of Slovak Jews (58,000) were deported and only a few hundred survived the war. In the beginning the transports began with only the deportation of Jewish girls.

Marie-Laure Ryan in her *Possible Worlds* generally defines the plot as a conflict between the individual worlds of the characters and the actual state of affairs in the narrative world (Ryan, 1991). This definition may be applied to Grosman's story. The contrast between the characters' expectations (their hopes and illusions) and the readers' expectations (the knowledge of what must come) creates its dramatic tension.

The narrator's position changes. From a limited narrator describing current situations he becomes a narrator who knows what will happen in the future. When the Jewish girls leave the cinema accompanied by armed guards, he comments: "none of the afflicted knew it was just a stop on the way to that from which they would never return" (Grosman, 2020, 159). Lízinka refuses to participate in the registration, she hides in a Slovak acquaintance's stable. At the very end of the story, she ceases to hide and decides to leave the stable. It is not known where she intends to go. Her story is unfinished, but it is certain that, like the other Jews in the town, a tragic fate awaits her.

In conclusion, this article has analyzed the strategies in classic Yiddish short stories by Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz. Their stories have been compared to those of the Czech authors Ivan Olbracht and Ladislav Grosman. The stories of Olbracht and Grosman were inspired by these

Yiddish works. Olbracht's *The Miracle with Julča* used the narrative system found in Aleichem's short story *The German* as well as the stereotypical character of a smart Jew. On the other hand, Olbracht extended the limited first-person perspective of Aleichem's story to build more point of views. Olbracht's development of this device allowed a different construction of the plot's conclusion. In contrast, Grosman was inspired by the entire tradition of classic Yiddish literature, mainly by its use of exaggeration, irony and the grotesque, examples of which have been presented in this article via the stories *Hard Luck*, *Elijah the Prophet* (Aleichem) and *The Shtrayml* (Peretz). Grosman's plot begins as a traditional Jewish family story with stereotypical characters who are looking for a groom and planning a wedding with a disobedient daughter, and with naive and smart Jews. From a family story, however, a depiction of the beginning of the tragic fate of the Jews in Slovakia unfolds. It is presented via the significant change of the narrator's point of view. He is not only a witness to the events but in the end, he also becomes an omniscient narrator outside the plot, who knows the future. This is in stark contrast mainly to Aleichem's story *Elijah the Prophet* and its open ending. The ending of *The Bride* concerns the knowledge that informed readers have about the external historical events, but this can hardly fulfill their need for closure. Readers are left feeling disturbed, and this is intensified by the narrator's fragmentary storytelling. Grosman's *The Bride* is thus different from the aforementioned Jewish stories.

From the above texts is evident that Yiddish literature had an impact on twentieth-century Czech authors, which has hitherto been insufficiently researched.

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